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## **Workload and Job Satisfaction among Frontliners of Public Sector**

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### **Abstract**

Disease outbreaks threat, as well as natural disasters such as floods and earthquakes in this region have implication for employees of some public sector organizations. The implication is more pronounced among frontliners particularly in terms of their workload and job satisfaction. Workload occurs when an employee has too much work and needs to be done in a certain period of time. Its occurrence causes pressure on employee who needs to overcome the inability (due to limited resources) to do the work. This phenomenon becomes a challenge for employees to perform their duties effectively and efficiently. Effectiveness and efficiency in performing tasks can be associated with job satisfaction. Past studies have shown a relationship between workload and job dissatisfaction among employees. In fact, a few studies reported the relationship between workload and job satisfaction in various job groups. However, in different circumstances there are also studies which failed to prove the relationship between the two variables. So, it is clear that past studies in this context are inconsistent. In addition, the focus on workload and job satisfaction among civil servant frontliners, especially those in uniform, is also being less emphasized. Therefore, it is appropriate for future research to look into this scope of study especially in the context of developing countries in South East Asia.

**Keywords:** workload, job satisfaction, frontliners, public sector

### **INTRODUCTION**

Employees of the public sector in this region are currently faced with various challenges. Apart from challenges that exist due to emergence of industry 4.0 revolution, the problems that come from disease outbreaks such as the covid-19 pandemic and other natural disasters have also caused civil servants to be in an uncomfortable situation. This apparently be seen among those who are given the responsibility to handle the disaster directly, whom are also being known as frontliner.

Disease outbreaks threat, be they epidemic or pandemic, as well as natural disasters that commonly occur in this region such as floods and earthquakes are difficult to be predicted accurately in terms of time and place of their occurrence. Consequently government agencies which involve directly in dealing with these phenomena face difficulty particularly in the aspects of planning and coordination of works among their employees. It is undeniable that when there is a sudden disaster the probability of increasing workload among employees to handle the problem is relatively high. This is because the management of an organization must act immediately to address the threat which has a negative impact on human life. Therefore, apart from financial and asset requirements,

additional workload need to be distributed to employees and most likely this is done in the state or quality of unpreparedness. In this regard, obviously the front-line workers are inevitably given this burden.

## **EMPLOYEES' WORKLOAD**

Workload can be referred to a situation in which an employee has too much work that needs to be done within a certain period of time (Conley & Woosley, 2000). This is about incompatibility between needs, time constraints and work-related resources provided to meet these needs. (Rizzo, 1970). According to Latip, Tak, Rahaman, and Abdul Kohar (2018), due to increase of productivity and performance demand, employees are given workloads which are beyond their capability to handle them. Consequently, this leads to work overload among employees. While to Shittu, Hassan, and Nawaz (2018), they found that in large organizations employees always being assigned several tasks, and these tasks need to be completed within a short period of time.

Workload can also been considered as part of role conflict. In relation to this, Conley and Woosley (2000), argue that resources, time constraints and skills are all placed under the definition of role conflict. In discussing the issue of role conflict, Rosman (2007), explains that exercise beyond the ability of an employee occurs when he or she is burdened with tasks that exceed the limit (due to high demand), unbalanced division of tasks or perform various tasks in a limited time. This can cause conflict priority to exist in which it requires a person to differentiate between tasks at different levels of importance.

Another issue that often being included in discussing the workload is job pressure, that is a pressure given to a person according to the position (role) to be implemented in the organization. These tasks sometimes require longer working hours to complete (Whinghter, Cunningham, Wang, & Burnfield, 2008). Razak, Yusof, Azidin, Latif and Ismail (2014), associate the occurrence of workload to the result of pressure on a work that needs to be done to overcome the ability (resources) to do the work.

Impact of workload on human well-being also being addressed by several researchers. For example Poulsen, Khan, and Poulsen (2016), stress that workload will contribute to fatigue and error at the work because it (workload) may lead towards emotional exhaustion. This argument is supported by Yang, Shen, Zhu, Liu, Deng, Chen, and See (2016), who indicate that workload will play an important role in emotional exhaustion. Besides that, workload is believed to be one of the indicators of work stress among employees. On this point, it is a source of mental stress experienced by employees (Shah, Jaffari, Aziz, Ejaz, Ul-Haq, & Raza, 2011. Accordingly, to employees workload is a challenge for them to perform their duties effectively and efficiently (Sheraz, Wajid, Sajid, Qureshi, & Rizwan, 2014).

Workload carried by employees in a workplace and its relationship with job satisfaction is one of the organizational behavior issues that often being highlighted by researchers. Existence of these two variables relationship in various job groups has been reported

academically (Butt & Lance, 2005, Gaither, Kahaleh, Doucette, Mott, Pederson, & Schommer 2008; Awang, Ahmad, & Zin, 2010; Correa & Ferreira, 2011; Rai, 2013). It is important to stress that study in this area is still relevant currently and in the future.

## **RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORKLOAD AND JOB SATISFACTION**

Relationship of workload with job satisfaction is elaborated based on several perspectives. For example, a study by Ali and Farooqi (2014), revealed the relationship between workload and job satisfaction and they emphasize that it is the most important thing in the organization. While Altaf and Awan (2011), found that workload has a negative influence on job satisfaction. Similarly, Mustapha and Ghee (2013), state that there is a negative and significant relationship between workload and job satisfaction.

From the other perspectives, Hsu, Bai, Yang, Huang, Lin and Hung's (2019), study had reported a significant correlation between long working hours with occupational stress and work-life balance, as well as between occupational stress, work-life balance and job satisfaction. While study by Mustapha and Zakaria (2013), found that job satisfaction occurs when employees are provided with an appropriate workload. Finding of this study was supported by Tunggreni and Thinni Nurul (2013). While Alrawahi, Sellgren, Alwahaibi, Altouby, and Brommels (2019), stress that besides homework interface, role ambiguity and performance pressure, workload pressure may also affect one's job satisfaction. As for Srimarut and Mekhum (2020), based on the structural equation modelling as a tool of analysis, they conclude that the workload is an elemental predictor of job satisfaction.

There are a few researchers who incorporated individual's stress and emotion in addressing the relationship between workload and job satisfaction. As an instance, Correa and Ferreira (2011), argue that people who realize they are required to work in positions with greater demands than their own abilities, tend to feel less satisfied and have negative emotions towards their jobs. Apart from that, a study conducted by Omar et al., (2015), found that the workload among uniformed officers is heavy because they have to perform tasks regardless of time, especially outside of actual working hours and face security problems. This to some extent disrupts an employee's own emotions and has a negative impact. Malik, Ghafoor and Iqbal (2013), also found that workload is detrimental to job satisfaction as employees feel stress and do not like it.

A study in the United Kingdom showed that majority of workers were dissatisfied with the culture of their organizations in which it requires them to work longer hours and cause them to face greater workload and at the same time must meet production targets and deadlines (Townley, 2000). On top of that, Essiam, Mensah and Gyamfi (2015), say that work done under pressure regardless of organization, environment or colleagues can lead to various problems related to job satisfaction, performance, psychology and so on. Researchers have also outlined some factors that can have a negative impact on job satisfaction such as workload and role uncertainty. However on the positive side there are favorable factors such as harmless work environment, an organization that is always considerate, has opportunities in job development and considerate colleagues.

On the other end of the spectrum, Lynch and Wright (2019) indicate that workload will bring stress to an employee and this can have impact on employee's performance and at the same time workload is one of the factors that will not affect job satisfaction among them. Similar view shared by Goh, Ilies, and Wilson (2015), who claim that workload does not affect job satisfaction. With regard to this, individuals do not assess job satisfaction well due to high job demand. Thus, there might be other factors that influence the relationship between workload and job satisfaction. In addition, other studies also found similar results that is a positive relationship between workload and employee satisfaction (Rehman, Irum, Tahir Ijaz, Noor, & Salma, 2012; Koçoglu, Gürkan & Aktas, 2014). However in connection to this, larger sample should be considered in order to obtain more accurate results.

## **CONCLUSION**

Findings of previous studies clearly show that workload is harmful to the organization as it can adversely affect employees' job satisfaction. Job satisfaction that occurs among employees may cause them to be evaluated and categorized under underperformer. Hence, there is a likelihood that the unfavorable performance of these employees can affect the organization's efforts to achieve its goals. Previous studies have evidence to substantiate the relationship between workload and job satisfaction among employees in the organization. However, there were also studies which failed to prove this relationship. Due to inconsistency of research findings in this area as well as lack of research conducted in the services sector, it is appropriate for researchers to consider this scope of study for future research. In this respect, effort to focus on frontliners of government agencies in the context of Southeast Asia should be given a priority.

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